

## **Series Apostles' Creed**

### **This Message The Introduction "I Believe...."**

This is the first lesson in a new series based on the Apostles' Creed. In the history of the Christian Church, there have been four major creeds. The Apostles' Creed has been used in the worship services of protestant church fellowships more than any other.

There are no formal creeds given in the NT, but there are numerous confessional statements which were repeated many times by believers in the churches of the First Century. These statements were considered to be so essential to the faith of the followers of Christ that they developed into creedal formulas.

Let me give you several examples of how this happened. On one occasion Jesus asked His disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" Simon Peter responded, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God" (Matthew 16:13, 16). That description of Jesus, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God" became one of the essential statements of faith. The Apostle Paul declared that every tongue should "confess that Jesus Christ is Lord" (Philippians 2:11). Another essential truth. To the believers in Rome, Paul explained, "If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9). Another foundational truth. To the believers in Corinth, Paul wrote, "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures" (I Corinthians 15:3). He also wrote, "No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit" (I Corinthians 12:3).

The early Church compiled and organized these kinds of statements into a summary of important doctrines. At first they were called "the rule of faith." This "rule of faith" was used in training new believers. Candidates for baptism, for example, would memorize the statements, recite them publically to the congregation, and then explain and affirm their belief in the meaning. During the third century, the statements became standardized and were recognized as "the canon of truth" or the creeds.

During the past 2000 years some church groups became rather lax about the teaching of doctrines to their members, with the result that there have been too many spiritually immature believers — believers who are described in the New Testament as “infants” who don’t know their spiritual A, B, Cs, and who have to be fed milk instead of solid food (*Hebrews 5:12-14*). Immature believers are also compared to pieces of bark “tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming” (*Ephesians 4:14*). Spiritual immaturity kept some Church communities weak and ineffective.

In contrast, when the basic essential doctrines of the Christian faith were carefully taught, and when believers understood the doctrines and were able to clearly and accurately articulate their faith, the Church of Jesus Christ was strong and able to grow. The Scriptures inform us that when the truth is spoken in love, “we will in all things grow into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From Him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love (*Ephesians 4:15-16*). This is the goal for every church fellowship.

Our goals today in studying the Apostles’ Creed are the same as those of the leaders of the early churches:

- 1) We need to understand and affirm the essential truths of the gospel in order that we will be faithful in our generation to the 2000 year old heritage of the Church;
- 2) We need to properly disciple new believers (and sometimes remind long time believers) about the essential truths of the gospel; and
- 3) We need a standard by which to evaluate basic truths in order to refute heretical ideas when they arise in church fellowships.

The refutation of heresy is a serious issue today. Not every person who calls himself/herself a Christian wants to remain true to the historical beliefs and practices of the Church. When we studied the First Letter of John, we learned that false teachers were a problem in the early church. Unbiblical and heretical teachings are even more of a problem today. We don’t have to become learned theological scholars in order to remain true to the basic aspects of our faith, but we should be able to articulate the essential doctrines of our faith. These are the reasons why we will study the Apostles’ Creed.

## ***Apostle's Creed***

*I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth;*

*And in Jesus Christ His only Son, our Lord: who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hades; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of God, the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead.*

*I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.  
Amen*

The Apostles' Creed begins with the words, "I believe." In worship services, the creed is always recited in unison, but it is actually a very personal statement. Faith in God is expressed by individuals, just as relationship with God is on an individual basis. The truths articulated in the creed must be internalized by each believer if they are to be sincere and authentic.

The Apostles' Creed begins with the words, "I believe," rather than, "I know." Faith is much more than knowledge, although knowledge is the basis of genuine faith. Faith is action taken in response to information which has been learned. Believers prove their faith by taking action on what they know. Faith is not simply the assent of the intellect to revealed truth; it is the practical submission of the entire person to the guidance and control of such truth.

All people have faith in something. Actually, in our lives, we must have faith in many somethings. We would not be able to live without confidence in the trustworthiness of things outside of ourselves. At a very ordinary level, we trust that the chair we put our bodies in will hold us up. We trust that the light will go on when we flip the switch. We trust that the airplane will lift us and all the other people and luggage off the ground and get us safely to our destination.

At a different level, we trust ourselves to the doctors who prescribe our medicines and perform our surgeries. When we sign a contract, or drive on the highway, or get married, elements of trust are necessary. Each day we are required to exercise faith in the reliability of a multitude of both things and people. There is simply no way we can function in society without faith; without confidence in many things around us.

If you were to promise me something, I might say, “I believe you.” What I mean is, I believe that you will keep your promise; I am trusting in your moral integrity. I have confidence that you will fulfill what you said you would do. I believe that you are the sort of person I can depend on — the sort of person who will not let me down.

That is the attitude we must have when we recite the Apostles’ Creed. The words in the creed are very specific about what the believer must trust in: God the Father Almighty, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. When we say, “I believe,” it should mean that we are convinced that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are at the “deep core” of all things, and that we are willing to live in the knowledge of who they are and what they have accomplished.

What is belief, and why is it so important? The dictionary informs us that belief is “an opinion or conviction.” That’s the general definition. When we get more specific, we read: belief is “confidence in the existence of something not immediately susceptible to rigorous proof.” This second definition is close to some of the statements in Scripture. For example, in Hebrews 11:6 we read, concerning God, “Anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him.” It is not possible to prove or disprove the existence of God on the basis of scientific evidence, so when a person comes to a conviction about the reality of God, he/she has demonstrated a degree of faith. An element of obedient action is also required, because the verse declares that God will reward the person with an awareness of His reality only if the person earnestly seeks Him.

In Hebrews 11:3 there is another reference to belief: “By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command.” There are numerous scientific theories about the origin of the universe. The believer may not understand how God created the universe but, by faith, the believer can acknowledge the fact that God did it. Belief is “the confidence in the existence of something not immediately susceptible to rigorous proof.”

In the matter of personal salvation, faith and belief are once again vitally important. Jesus taught, “for God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life” (*John 3:16*). In their teaching, the apostles over and over exhorted their listeners: “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved” (*Acts 16:31*), and “It is by grace you have been saved, through faith” (*Ephesians 2:8*). It is not only necessary that a person believe in the existence of God and in His creative work, but he/she must also believe that God reached out in love and grace to His human creation, offering salvation.

The overall truth that we must remember is that “without faith it is impossible to please God” (*Hebrews 11:6*). When we say, “I believe” in the Apostle’s Creed, we are affirming significant doctrinal truths of the New Testament. In his letter to the church fellowship in Corinth, the Apostle Paul wrote “We live by faith, not by sight” (*II Corinthians 5:7*). This is the principle which should guide our lives here on earth. Also in II Corinthians Paul wrote, “It is by faith you stand firm” (*II Corinthians 1:24*). There are many negative circumstances which confront us in life. How do we cope with overwhelming situations? The answer is: by faith — belief that God exists, that He created the universe, that He is sovereign over all, that He reaches out to us in love and grace, and allows us to know Him, by faith.

One of the significant points to be emphasized here concerns the object upon which we place our faith. People can base their security, expectations, and hopes on many things. Money and material possessions, power and prestige, science and education, political allegiances, religious philosophies, etc.. Most people orient their lives around ideas and items they can touch and see and experience in physical ways. These people place their faith only in those things which they can perceive through their physical senses.

This is all very different from the orientation of the believer who looks to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit for guidance and direction in life.

The great illustration in Scripture about how faith works is the life of Abraham. In a previous series we thought a lot about the spiritual journey of Abraham. We read that God made a promise to Abraham concerning the many descendents he would have. There is a summary description of Abraham's faith in Romans chapter 4. Verse 17 explains that Abraham "believed God — the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were." Abraham placed his confidence where it needed to be — in the One who was sovereign over everything.

Verse 19 indicates that Abraham did not close his eyes to the reality of his situation. He was 99 years old and Sarah, his wife, was past the time of bearing children. Abraham had to believe that God could and would do something that was a physical impossibility if the promise was to be fulfilled. Verse 20 explains that Abraham "did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God." His faith functioned in the area beyond what was logical and familiar to him. In his mind the promise of God was more trustworthy than the physical realities. By faith he praised God in advance for what God would do. Verse 21 states that he was "fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised." That is the essence of faith.

When we recite the Apostles' Creed, we must be fully persuaded about the truths contained in the words. Nothing is more important for our spiritual lives than to have a solid basis for our faith and confidence. When we say the words of the Creed, we should say them with our minds and our hearts. We need to believe with every fiber of our being.